

Citizen Advisory Committees

Michigan law authorizes each county to establish a citizen advisory committee for the friend of the court. Commonly asked questions and answers about the committees follow.

Who can serve on the citizen advisory committee?

The committee is composed of the following members, each of whom must be a resident of the county:

1. An advocate for children.
2. A representative of noncustodial parents.
3. A representative of custodial parents.
4. An attorney who engages primarily in family law practice.
5. The county sheriff or the sheriff's designee.
6. The prosecuting attorney or the prosecuting attorney's designee.
7. The director of the Family Independence Agency or the director's designee.
8. A mental health professional who provides family counseling.
9. A member of the general public who is not an individual who could serve on the committee in a category listed above.

Who appoints members to the citizen advisory committee?

The county board of commissioners or, where proper, the county executive with advice and consent of the county board, appoints citizen advisory committee members. Neither the friend of the court nor the chief judge appoint members to the committee. If you wish to serve on the committee, you should contact one of your county commissioners, the county executive, or the county administrator for information on how to apply.

What authority does the committee have?

A citizen advisory committee is advisory only. The responsibilities of the committee are to:

- (a) Meet not less than six times annually, keep minutes of each meeting, and submit a copy of the minutes to the county board.

- (b) Review and investigate grievances filed with the committee concerning friend of the court operations.
- (c) Advise the court and the county board on:
 - the office of the friend of the court;
 - the friend of the court's duties and performance; and
 - community needs relating to office services.
- (d) Submit an annual report of its activities to the county board, court, State Court Administrative Office, Governor's office, and the Senate and House committees and appropriations subcommittees that are responsible for legislation concerning the judicial branch.

Can I attend citizen advisory committee meetings?

A citizen advisory committee meeting is open to the public. Members of the public must be given an opportunity to comment on any issue under consideration. If a vote is to be taken by the committee, the public must be allowed to comment before the vote is taken. A citizen advisory committee meeting is not open to the public while the committee is reviewing, investigating, or holding a hearing on a grievance.

How do I find out when and where the citizen advisory committee for my friend of the court meets?

Your county board of commissioners, the county executive, or the county administrator can tell you how to obtain information about citizen advisory committee meeting places and times. The friend of the court office may have this information available, if provided by the committee.

What if I have a complaint about the friend of the court?

A party who has a complaint concerning friend of the court office operations or employees may use the grievance procedure. Forms to file the grievance should be available at your local friend of the court office.

- (a) File the grievance, in writing, with the friend of the court office where your case is located. The office is required to investigate and decide the grievance within 30 days or give the party filing the grievance a reason why a response is not possible within that time.

- (b) A party who is not satisfied with the decision of the friend of the court office may file a further grievance, in writing, with the chief judge of the circuit court. The chief judge is required to investigate and decide the grievance within 30 days or give the party filing the grievance the reason why a response is not possible within that time.
- (c) At any time during the grievance procedure, a party with a complaint regarding office operations may file a written grievance with the citizen advisory committee. In its discretion, the committee will conduct a review or investigation of, or hold a hearing on, the grievance. The citizen advisory committee may appoint subcommittees to review grievances. If a citizen advisory committee reviews or investigates a grievance, the committee must respond to the grievance within a reasonable period of time.

Can I file a grievance against a friend of the court employee or court order with the citizen advisory committee?

No, a grievance filed with the citizen advisory committee can only be about office operations. The committee cannot review grievances about an employee, a recommendation, or the content of a court order or office decision.

How does the committee review the performance of the friend of the court if no grievances are submitted directly to the committee?

The committee is required to randomly select and review grievances submitted to the office of the friend of the court, as well as the friend of the court response to the grievances. The committee must report its findings to the court and the county board, either immediately or in its annual report. Finally, the citizen advisory committee must examine grievances filed with the friend of the court and review or investigate each grievance that claims a decision by a friend of the court employee was made based on gender rather than the best interests of the child.

Can the citizen advisory committee review my friend of the court file?

A citizen advisory committee shall have access to a grievance filed with the friend of the court and to information related to the case, other than confidential information. The committee may be given access to confidential information if the court orders the committee to have that information.

What does the citizen advisory committee do after it reviews a grievance?

The committee advises the county board and the circuit court on the performance of the friend of the court. The committee's conclusions about grievances reviewed should be part of the information provided to the court and county board. The committee has no authority to make changes in friend of the court procedures, recommendations, or court orders.

Friend of the Court

Citizen Advisory Committee

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